NIH Service Provider Discussion

April 14, 2004

1. Page 1: "A detailed description of the Rules will be published the week of March 22." Today is March 31st and I don't think we have seen the Rules.

   Answer: We are still working on some of the details of the Rules (Terms and Conditions), particularly with respect to our first attempt at a certification process. We will publish something by the end of this week, which should also address your issue #2.

2. Page 2: "The Service Providers need to submit successfully in the NIH TEST database...." This, along with other comments, gives us the impression that both Test and Production servers are being implemented again (each with Val and Info?). In previous pilots, a great deal of time was spent by us, other Service Providers and NIH/CGAP chasing down issues related to data inconsistencies between the two servers. Would CGAP personnel be willing to send a valid proposal, in PDF format, to the Service Providers for us to use in the test submissions? Among other things, this would ensure that the persons listed on the trial proposals are indeed in the Test database and their data correctly formatted. We could reproduce the proposal in our systems and submit them to the test site.

   Answer: Yes, we will implement both Test and Production servers, each with val and info exchanges.

   We need to keep a separate environment for TEST and PRODUCTION. We cannot afford to test software in production. There are more than 800–1,200 concurrent users any given day in the eRA systems. We cannot risk interfering with that user base.

   The data between TEST and PROD will always be somewhat different. The strategy is:

   - **Test your code in TEST against whatever data is there**
   - **Validate your applications in production using the validation service**
   - **Check the information about people using the Person Information service**

   In late March, we refreshed the TEST environment from the PROD database so the data should be much more current.

   We also are working on a service to allow the UPDATE (only) of a person profile by the Service Provider. Expect a test for that service in June or July and a deployment for September.

3. Page 2: "New specifications will be published the week of March 22." This refers to the "Validations_for_Service_Providers..." document, correct?

   Answer: Yes.

4. Page 2: For the June 1 deadline, can the Modular budgets include Consortia?

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   Answer: For June and July, we cannot handle consortia, mostly because we can't support multiple budget submissions at this time. We can support the submission of "contractual costs" in the consortium budget category to represent contractual costs for a purchase-service contract that is not a full-blown consortium.

To clarify further: CGAP will support an estimate of total consortium/contractual costs for a modular submission as part of the <PersonnelExplanation> component of the data stream (within <ResearchAndRelatedProject> <BudgetSummary> <ModularBudgetDetails>). Since it's for a modular budget, CGAP will not support the submittal of consortium costs as part of the components that fall within the <SalariesAndWages> components, since those are only for non-modular budgets.

5. Page 2: "High priority defects identified in March pilot will be fixed." What are these? Is the need to accept Greek characters in the title on the list? This is not a theoretical issue; it caused us significant hardship in the March pilot. If not, I suggest the published scope of the pilot must specifically exclude proposals with any Greek or other special characters in the title.

Answer: We will publish the detailed bug list next week. We are working on the special characters issue; however, it does not look like it will be resolved for this pilot.

The current NIH rule is to use the Greek character written out like ALPHA in the project title. There are some NIH downstream systems that are not set up to process special characters and until these systems are upgraded, NIH will not accept special characters in the title. No quick fix is anticipated.

6. Page 3: "If feasible... Provide grant image from validation exchange". HURRAH! This would be most appreciated!

Answer: The service will be available as a Web service only. We will not ship applications in unsecured email.

7. Page 3: "PI/SO verification (with(in) 48 hours of submission of application)." This is not enough time. One of our companion institutions has already said this is untenable. What if the PI is traveling? What would happen if the successful submission should occur on Friday, June 4? The PI and SO would then have to approve it over the weekend.

Answer: This time period was determined by our stakeholders in CSR; however, this does not need to be in place for the pilot. If the PI and SO verify by June 11 for the June 1 receipt date, the application will be accepted.

Eventually, though, CSR does want 48-hour verifications with a required justification if they're past the 48 hours.

Also, we mean 48 business hours. We will clarify this point in our communications.

8. Page 3: "If rejected send paper within 48 hours." It might be better to specify a date, say "... by June 10."

Answer: We will take this under consideration.

9. Please, please find a way to let folks upload a budget justification PDF.-Also, I personally feel that notifying the SRAs and highlighting the difference is a mistake. To succeed, we need to convince everyone (reviewers included) that going electronic is not that big of a deal. [It isn't!]

Answer: For the July pilot, we are sticking to the plan to pilot a text-based budget justification. We will not be able to develop and test a PDF-based budget justification in time for the July receipt date. We plan to implement this in October.

We agree that we need to convince everyone that going electronic is not that big of a deal. However, experience with the last two pilots has told us that we should be upfront and communicate to the review community in particular that there are some minor differences between paper, scanned, and electronic applications to reduce confusion. Particularly in the pilot phases of this endeavor, we want to make sure that small formatting differences are not interpreted to reflect negatively on the PI and we plan to highlight the positives of the electronic image.

10. Will the Introduction to the Revised Application be available as a PDF in July? July will provide the PDF for the Introduction to the Revised Application, right?

Answer: Yes